

eastern cicada killer *Sphecius speciosus*

Kingdom: Animalia

Division/Phylum: Arthropoda

Class: Insecta

Order: Hymenoptera

Family: Crabronidae

ILLINOIS STATUS common, native

FEATURES

Also known as the cicada hawk, the eastern cicada killer is a type of digger wasp. Size of these insects ranges from about six-tenths of an inch to two inches in length. The abdomen is black to red-brown with yellow stripes. The thorax has red and black areas with hairs. Wings are brown.

BEHAVIORS

These wasps are solitary. Adults eat flower nectar and plant sap that can be found on the surface, such as seeping from a tree wound. Adults emerge in late June or July and die by September or October. Females are usually seen singly as they search for nesting sites and prey. Males often fly in groups. The female digs a burrow, about 10 to 20 inches deep. She digs with her jaws and uses her hind legs to push out dirt. Once the burrow is dug, the female captures cicadas and paralyzes them with her sting. She turns the cicada so that it lays with its feet up, then she grasps it with her legs and flies to the burrow. She lays an egg on the cicada, and when she is finished stocking the cell with cicadas, closes it with dirt. Male eggs are enclosed with one cicada. Female eggs are enclosed with two or three cicadas because the female is larger and needs more food. Eggs hatch within two days. Larvae complete development in about two weeks. The mature larva overwinters in an earthen cocoon. The pupa is formed in the spring.

HABITATS

Aquatic Habitats

bottomland forests

Woodland Habitats

bottomland forests; southern Illinois lowlands; upland deciduous forests

Prairie and Edge Habitats

black soil prairie; edge; hill prairie; sand prairie; shrub prairie

© Illinois Department of Natural Resources. 2020. Biodiversity of Illinois.